



**CALIFORNIA
HIGH-SPEED RAIL
AUTHORITY**

BRIEFING: JANUARY BOARD MEETING ITEM # 2

Date: December 28, 2011
TO: Chairman Umberg and Board Members
FROM: Lance Simmens, Deputy Director for Communications
RE: Agenda item #2 / Statewide Communications Restructuring

Proposal

Currently, the public outreach function of the Authority is spread out over ten (10) discernible segments of the proposed high-speed rail project, encompassing eight (8) different engineering contractors. There are three (3) primary regions covering the Bay Area, Central Valley, and Southern California. Currently there are three primary contacts for these regions, all under contract to individual engineering contractors. The proposal presented here is meant to be considered as an option to issuance of a statewide communications contract. The concept is to better utilize existing public outreach assets currently under contract to our engineering partners and augment a more structured field organization with six additional positions to the compliment currently employed by the Communications office in Headquarters.

There is currently little direct communication between central headquarters in Sacramento and public outreach specialists, numbering at least thirty-three (33) in number, other than semi-regular discussions with the three lead regional contacts identified above. Communication is ad hoc, irregular, not institutionalized, and there is seemingly little if any accountability between the Communications office and field operatives, other than regular communication with the three identified regional leads.

As we move from planning to implementation a more highly structured communications organization is desirable. The current operating system is functional but not optimal. The choices are to either continue to utilize contracts as a method for performing many of the communications functions necessary or bring activities in-house with more direct control. Of course the latter course will require additional personnel resources, but along with accountability I believe significant costs savings can be realized as well. While staffing up represent a significant challenge in this budget constrained environment, it also represents an opportunity to implement a two-way flow of communications through a tighter, streamlined, and more defined set of institutional relationships that directly connect what is occurring in the field with intelligence, information flow, and messaging from headquarters.

Where there are currently no formal solid lines connecting filed operatives with the Communications shop at headquarters, the accompanying proposal and organizational chart is intended to better utilize these important assets in a way that is not disruptive of current reporting relationships. The proposal offered here is intended to increase and enhance a flow of information from the bottom-up and vice-versa. Existing relationships on environmental studies and reports and existing relationships with the Program Management Team are not affected, but instead an additional level of responsibility for

communications activities is required of current field operatives. It is vitally important that strong linkages in all facets of the communications structure extend to the critical personnel that are our boots on the ground.

In order to facilitate a more effective and efficient Communications operation the proposal establishes three distinct regional communications directors who eventually will contract directly with the Authority and have budgets attached to the position in order to cover expenses of activities such as hearings, workshops, meetings, and general public outreach functions. This will require an anticipated budgetary impact of \$600,000 for the three positions and operating expenses. Until such positions are secured and filled, the proposal envisions maintaining the three primary contacts in the regions (Val Martinez in Southern California, Bryn Forham in the Central Valley, and Katherine Strehl in the Bay Area) in the positions of regional communications directors.

The Communications office is presently staffing up for the expected increase in activities projected for 2012 and beyond. Recently we have hired two Press information officers and a part-time retired annuitant to help the Press Secretary with activities initially projected to be covered by a Statewide Communications contract (i.e. handling press inquiries, drafting op-eds, letter to the editor).

In order to enhance operation of the office further, the proposal envisions six additional hires including an Assistant Director to the Deputy Director for Communications (senior public affairs individual to help with messaging, strategy, and direction of press activities), a seasoned Writer to help with drafting documents including white papers, messaging and talking points, Congressional and legislative testimony, a junior level logistics support staffer to handle day-to day any issues involving internal communications (contracts, technical support), and three public affairs officers to augment activities within the press operation. These positions would be in addition to the three regional communications directors previously identified above; meaning that the total request would be nine additional positions in lieu of a statewide communications contract. By way of comparison Caltrans, with a construction budget of roughly \$10-11 billion has a communications staff of approximately 74 people.

Staff Recommendation: The Authority requests permission from the Board to proceed with establishing the Communications structure outlined in this proposal.